

# AN INTERNATIONAL MENU

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**SUBJECTS:** Language Arts, Social Studies

**STUDENT SKILL:** (LA) The student will recognize the origins and meanings of foreign words frequently used in English. (SS) The student will compare and contrast common characteristics of culture, such as language, customs, shelter, diet, traditional occupations, belief systems, and folk traditions.

**OBJECTIVE:** The student will use dictionaries to research etymologies and explore the diverse origins of common foods we eat.

## **BACKGROUND**

**etymology**—The origin and historical development of a word as shown by determining its basic elements, earliest known use and changes in form and meaning, tracing its transmission from one language to another, and identifying its cognates in other languages.

English is the language spoken by most of the people in the United States, even though our country is made up of people whose ancestors spoke many different languages. The native people who lived on this continent before Europeans came to settle it spoke many different languages also. The first Europeans to settle on the east coast spoke English, Dutch and German. Those who settled on the west coast spoke Spanish. French-speaking traders traveled all through the land, following the waterways. As more land was opened for settlement, English-speaking people found their neighbors were people who spoke Italian, Hungarian, Swedish, Chinese and many other languages.

Of the 1,000 major food crops harvested each year in North America, only Jerusalem artichokes, sunflowers, pecans, blueberries and cranberries are native. Each group of people who came to our shores brought their own foods. The Dutch brought cookies, waffles and coleslaw; the English brought biscuits and

MATERIALS  
dictionaries

world map



## VOCABULARY etymology

cheese. But they also found many new foods in the Americas for which they had no names. For some of the new foods they borrowed names from familiar European foods to which the new foods were similar. The English word "corn" is the name for all kinds of cereal grains—oats, barley, wheat, etc. Even today, corn in British English has a different meaning than it does in American English. All but a few varieties of beans originated in the New World, but English settlers gave them an English name, after the varieties they knew in the Old World. Peanuts, which are native to South America, were given their name because they are related to peas but taste like nuts.

The many varieties of chili peppers Columbus found in the New World have no relation to the black pepper which grows in the Far East. But since pepper was what he was looking for when he set out on his voyage, that was the name given to the spicy fruits he took back with him.

Some of the new foods were given names based on their appearance. The pale pink blossom of the cranberry resembles a crane, so settlers named it "cranberry."

For many of the new foods, European settlers simply used the names the native people had already given them. Squash comes from the Massachuset word "akootasquash." Massachuset was the language spoken by the people living in the area we now know as Massachusetts at the time the English began settling there. Tomatoes are native to an area once occupied by the Nahuatl people in what we now know as Mexico. The word "tomato" comes from the Nahuatl word "tomatl."

The foods Americans eat are a conglomeration of the foods of many lands. Many of our favorite foods have French names—soup, hash (from the French "hasher," to chop), casserole, mayonnaise—and Italian names—macaroni, broccoli, cantaloupe, bologna, pizza, spaghetti. The hamburger, probably the most American of all American foods, is named for a place in Germany. Even ketchup, our favorite condiment, takes its name from a Chinese word for sauce, "ketsiap." Ketsiap is a pickled fish sauce which was adapted from the Chinese by the Malay people and served to English sailors. Americans added the tomatoes.

### ACTIVITY

1. Divide students into groups of three or four, and provide one or two dictionaries for each group.
2. Ask students to name foods they know originated in foreign countries and name the country where they think the food

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- originated. List the foods and countries on the chalkboard.
3. Have students look up one or two of the foods in the dictionary. Explain the meaning of the word "etymology," and show students how to find the etymology of a word at the beginning or end of the dictionary entry. Then direct students to the front of the dictionary where abbreviations used in the etymologies are listed. Have students read the abbreviations for you to write on the chalkboard.
  4. Share background material. Have students brainstorm to find other ways besides foods that foreign words enter the English language (place names, new technology, fashion, etc.) List examples on the chalkboard.
  5. Hand out student worksheets, and discuss the instructions. Students may take the worksheets home and complete them independently or work in groups, using the dictionaries available in the classroom.

### ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES

1. Have students list their favorite foods, look up their origins in the dictionary and locate the country of origin on a world map.
2. Have students bring food from home representing different ethnic groups for a tasting party. Students may also research and dress in the costume of the country from which their ethnic dishes originated.
3. If you have an Asian food store in your area, take your class on a field trip to visit it. Arrange for someone from the store to talk to students about how the different foods are used.

### EXTRA READING

- Albyn, Carole Lisa, *The Multicultural Cookbook for Students*, Oryx, 1993.
- Bowen, Gary, *Stranded at Plimoth Plantation, 1626*, Harper Collins, 1994.
- Forsyth, Adrian, *How Monkeys Make Chocolate: Foods and Medicines From the Rainforest*, Owl, 1995.

### EVALUATION

A teacher answer page is provided, based on *The American Heritage Dictionary, 2nd College Edition*. Answers may vary slightly, depending on the dictionary the student uses.